

VZCZCXRO9575
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1536/01 1290621
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 090621Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1076
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001536

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PART 1 OF 3: HOW SADRISTS TOOK SADR CITY COUNCIL

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1168
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 1071

Classified By: Classified by Deputy PolCouns Charles O. Blaha, reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) This cable forms the first part of a three-part series on the relationship between the Sadr City District Advisory Council (DAC) and the Sadrists located in the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS). On May 4, poloff conducted a protracted interview with Heyder S. Zedan and Suaad A. Allami, two leading moderates on the Sadr City DAC, following their meeting with the Adhamiya-Sadr City EPRT. This cable provides the perspective of Zedan and Allami on the Sadrist take over of the Sadr City DAC between 2003 and 2006. The following cable (septel) will examine the moderates' recent "push back" against the Sadrists. The final cable (septel) will provide detailed information about contemporary life in Sadr City, including the Sadrist extortion racket and available healthcare facilities.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY: Sadr City DAC Members Heyder S. Zedan and Suaad A. Allami told poloff May 4 that the OMS attitude toward the Sadr City DAC shifted from indifference to violence after Sadrists recognized that the DAC had acquired two key sources of local legitimacy: popular sanction through elections; and resources through the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). When their bid failed to take over the DAC by physically occupying DAC offices, the Sadrists launched a campaign to intimidate and terrorize DAC members. Since September 2003, seven of the original 41 DAC members have died in targeted killings, and twenty-five have resigned. After the death or resignation of each DAC member, the OMS doggedly manipulated and intimidated Neighborhood Advisory Councils (NACs) to ensure that they elected Sadrists to assume vacated DAC seats. Throughout this sporadic election process, five NAC members have died in targeted killings, and Sadrists won election to every vacated seat. END SUMMARY.

TACTIC 1: OCCUPY DAC FACILITIES

[1](#)3. (C) According to Zedan and Allami, the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) did not have the organizational capacity nor the interest to compete for seats in the first district council elections of May, 2003. Initially, they appeared indifferent toward the DAC, possibly because DACs operate without an annual budget of their own and without authority to provide basic municipal services. Over time, however, the OMS realized that the Sadr City DAC had acquired two key sources of local legitimacy: popular sanction through elections; and access to resources through the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). One evening in August, 2003, after DAC members finished work for the day, Sadrists stormed the DAC offices and occupied them. They refused to leave. The multi-national forces offered to arrest them, but DAC members sought to "avoid causing trouble," and tried instead to negotiate. After a month-long stand off, DAC leaders

requested that MNF arrest the Sadrists in September, 2003. The MNF released all of them shortly thereafter. (NOTE: The leader of the group of Sadrists that occupied the DAC offices, Naeem Aboub Al-Kaby, currently serves as Municipality Deputy Mayor (reftel A and B). END NOTE.)

TACTIC 2: INTIMIDATE AND MURDER DAC MEMBERS

¶4. (C) After the failure of this direct bid to claim the DAC by occupying its offices, the Sadrists appeared to change their tactics. Many of the 41 DAC members began to receive threats. Between 2003 and 2007, seven of the original DAC members died in targeted killings, including the first DAC Chairman. (The DAC decided not to replace the Chairman's seat, reducing the total number of DAC members from 41 to 40.) Of the remaining 33 original DAC members, twenty-five eventually resigned, many fleeing Iraq. In total, of the 41 non-Sadrists first elected to the Sadr City DAC, 32 have either died or resigned. Only nine independent DAC members serve on the council today.

TACTIC 3: REPLACE MURDERED MEMBERS WITH SADRISTS

¶5. (C) The Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) engaged in a conscious and deliberate effort to fill every open seat with a Sadrists. As soon as a member died or resigned, they began pressing the former member's Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC) to elect a Sadrists replacement to the DAC. The OMS applied pressure through threats and intimidation. Five members of Sadr City's NACs have died in targeted killings

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since the Sadrists began their campaign to take over the DAC through NAC elections. The OMS take over succeeded; the 30 new DAC members are all Sadrists.

NOTE AND COMMENT ON SOURCES

¶6. (C) Heyder S. Zedan is a doctor in Sadr City. He has served on the Sadr City DAC since the first district council election, on May 25, 2003. Currently, he serves as Chairman of the Sadr City DAC Committee on Health and Environment, and the Civil Society Committee. He is a self-declared "independent" on the DAC, and seeks to mitigate the influence of Sadrists members, whom he describes as "uneducated" and "violent." Zedan claims to have long cooperated with USG officials; in 2006, he traveled to the U.S. on the International Visitors Program. He told poloff that his family's status in Sadr City has helped to protect him from assassination, although he described several attempts on his life. (Both he and Allami said that they cannot inform friends, family or colleagues of their meeting with the USG without putting themselves in grave danger of assassination.) He said that his father is a Sheikh and his family is affluent. Zedan admitted that he left Iraq for Syria when threats on his life seemed most imminent, but continually returned to Sadr City and to the DAC.

¶7. (C) A combination of factors mark Zedan as a potential leader among Sadr City's moderates: He comes from a family with social stature; he has professional qualifications and training, which places him among Sadr City's educated elite; he has traveled outside Iraq; he is self-assured with an easy, open manner that contrasts the brooding demeanor of many of his council colleagues; he speaks English at an intermediate level. These qualities, which may earn him respect among educated moderates and access to USG officials, may also diminish his standing among Sadrists. He claims, however, to work seamlessly with Sadrists colleagues on the DAC, and to have the capacity to influence their thinking

(see septel).

¶8. (C) Zedan's colleague, Allami, is one of the few women serving on the Sadr City DAC. She is a lawyer who runs her own legal practice in Sadr City, specializing in family and property law. Like Zedan, Allami has served on the DAC since she won a seat in the first district council election of May, ¶2003. She currently serves as Chairwoman of the Legal Committee, and of the Committee on Women and Children; in addition, she serves as Zedan's deputy on the Civil Society Committee. Allami claims also to have maintained close ties to the USG since 2003. In her capacity as a lawyer and DAC member, she said that she led the process of remunerating the families of assassinated DAC members. She said that she personally transferred \$500,000 from the USG to 50 families of victims, providing each family with \$10,000. Much like Zedan, Allami has refused to resign from the Sadr City DAC despite threats and harassment. She dresses conservatively and appeared more socially reserved than Zedan. She speaks English at a basic level.

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